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LETTER DATED 14 SEPTEMBER 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued on 14 September 1999, entitled "Ethiopia's bottom line - aggression must be reversed" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, issued on 14 September 1999

Ethiopia's bottom line - aggression must be reversed

There is no need to dwell at length on the objectives of Ethiopia in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict. Ethiopia's objective has always been the same since day one - the reversal of Eritrean aggression. Borders cannot be changed by force and international law must be adhered to. This is what Ethiopia said in May 1998. This is what Ethiopia says today in September 1999.

If aggression is not allowed to stand, Eritrea would need to take the necessary measures to vacate territory previously administered by Ethiopia. It has done nothing of the sort. Whatever territory it has been forced to leave has been recovered through the sacrifice of thousands of lives. Eritrea cannot be allowed to remain on Ethiopian soil and present itself as the champion of peace.

Since the very beginning, international efforts were directed at resolving the conflict, with the focus on achieving a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible. For Ethiopia, the victim of aggression, the cessation of hostilities has always been linked to Eritrea's withdrawal from territory previously administered by Ethiopia.

The failure of Eritrea to withdraw from territory it forcibly occupied in May and June 1998 has been the fundamental cause for the crisis between the two countries, which is being prolonged by Eritrean intransigence.

In May 1998, the United States and Rwanda, following a laborious three-week shuttle between Addis Ababa and Asmara, brought forth a set of recommendations that called on Eritrea to withdraw its forces from the town of "Badme and its environs", and for the former (Ethiopian) administration to be restored. The response from Asmara was to retort that Eritrea would never leave Badme, "even if the sun were to fail to rise again", while at the same time grabbing more territory along other parts of the border.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the United States/Rwanda proposals and has, since June 1998, been calling for Eritrea to withdraw its troops. The OAU even had to send ambassadors to verify whether the territory had been under Ethiopian administration prior to 6 May 1998. Following such verification, the OAU High-Level Delegation, made up of the leaders of Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe and Djibouti, worked to formulate what came to be known as proposals for a Framework Agreement and, in November 1998, called on the two States to adopt them. Ethiopia, realizing that the proposals called for the reversal of the Eritrean aggression, accepted them. Eritrea refused to accept the proposals.

Furthermore, African leaders of countries that are members of the Central Organ for Conflict Prevention and Management met in mid-December and endorsed

the OAU proposals and called on both sides to swiftly implement them. Eritrea refused to heed the call of the OAU Central Organ and strengthened its military hold over the territories it had occupied by force.

In view of the fact that OAU and the international community as a whole were not achieving results, Ethiopia was forced to take defensive action and expel Eritrea from the Badme area. Thousands of lives were lost because of Eritrea's intransigence. Cynically and belatedly, on the morrow of their disastrous defeat at Badme at the end of February 1999, Eritrea's leaders said they accepted the OAU Framework Agreement.

Pressure was put to bear on Ethiopia to accept Eritrea's so-called acceptance of the Agreement at face value. But for Ethiopia, it was clear that Eritrea was only using its so-called "acceptance" to buy time. Eritrea's leaders not only refused to countenance withdrawal from areas other than Badme that were under their control, but they launched disastrous attempts to recapture Badme in late March, May and June 1999. Again thousands of lives were lost in an effort to widen the aggression, while at the same time Eritrea was telling the world that it has accepted the Framework Agreement.

In the meantime, it fell upon OAU to resolve a controversy created by Eritrea. Claiming that it was only required to withdraw from only part of the territory it had occupied by force (the part from which it had been evicted in February 1999 by Ethiopia), it refused to commit itself to withdraw from territories that it had overrun in June 1998. The letter of 8 May 1999 from the Chairman of OAU, President Blaise Campaore, calling on Eritrea to withdraw from all territories to positions it held prior to 6 May 1998, fell on deaf ears. It was only after further defeats on the ground, most notably in late June 1999, that the point was driven home to Eritrea's leaders that, at the very least, they had to appear to accept to return to the status quo ante as of 6 May 1998. All this after further damaging loss of life that will be evident to the world as time goes by.

This is the setting and context on the basis of which Eritrea's presentation of itself as a State ready to make peace should be seen. After having failed to have its amendments on the modalities for the Framework Agreement accepted during the June 1999 OAU summit in Algiers, Eritrea has been telling the world that it is ready for peace while:

- Launching attacks on Ethiopian positions in Zalanbessa on 1 and 2 September 1999;
- Embarking on a new round of military conscription;
- Intensifying its proxy war against Ethiopia through Somalia by launching terrorist groups;
- Dismantling settlements and towns it has occupied and working to transform the Ethiopian identity of the territories subject to redeployment.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise if Ethiopia should not put trust in the pledges made by the leaders of Eritrea to the effect that they would implement the peace plan. Neither can Ethiopia be blamed for not expecting justice at the hands of the international community. The world has yet to explicitly condemn Eritrea for its aggression, while it has not been silent when aggression has been committed in Europe and Asia, let alone compel Eritrea to leave territories it had taken by force.

That is why, at the very least, Ethiopia's position should be understood by the international community as a whole and the United Nations Security Council in particular, Ethiopia is not interested in prolonging the war; the war was imposed on it in the first place. Ethiopia has no motive other than the return of territories taken by Eritrea. Imputing this or that motive to Ethiopia while its territory is still occupied cannot be taken seriously.

Ethiopia has said from day one that it seeks first the withdrawal of Eritrean troops. More recently, in July 1999, Ethiopia explained its position in two letters to OAU Chairman, President Abdulaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, in which it was stressed that the verification of areas covered by redeployment will have to be finalized ahead of time, before any other measure in the peace process is taken. Ensuring this should not be a difficult task, and Ethiopia, as the victim of aggression, certainly deserves such a guarantee. The Ethiopian Government cannot be expected to tell its people, after all that has passed, that the restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty is dependent on the decision arrived at by third parties at a future date. It is when it is clearly demonstrated that aggression does not pay and that international law is respected that the agreement will truly be of value.

That Ethiopia remains committed to peace should be clear to all. Ethiopia, however, calls on the international community to understand its position and that what it seeks are firm guarantees that its territories will be returned, thereby paving the way for the peace process to proceed smoothly with the implementation of the OAU Framework Agreement. Various loopholes, real or apparent, have been used by Eritrea previously for refusing to do what it must. What it must do is vacate every inch of occupied Ethiopian land. This has always been Ethiopia's bottom line. Ethiopia asks nothing more and nothing less. No loopholes should, even at this stage, be allowed to frustrate Ethiopia's effort to ensure that the Eritrean aggression is reversed in full.